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Replacing the Mother, Reclaiming the Daughter: Silence and Othermothers in Elizabeth Nunez's *Bruised Hibiscus* and Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda*

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*[T]hat man I knew so well, better than his own children—
and that was how I came to know him so well, I was not really his child.
-Jamaica Kincaid, My Brother*

Kincaid's sentiment about the limited knowledge existing between parents and their biological children is a major thematic concern in contemporary Caribbean women's writings. While this concern exists in relation to both mothers and fathers, it persistently emerges in the form of the conflicted mother-daughter relationship that develops out of the daughter's struggle for cultural identity which is dependent upon knowledge passed from mother to daughter. Caroline Rody charts the development of the mother figure across women's writing in Caribbean literature, noting that the biological mother as a contentious figure is also prominent in Caribbean men's writing. Rody recognizes the conflation of the Caribbean mother with the Caribbean land and suggests that it creates an ambivalence around the fictional mother figure. She argues that this conflation appears with Caribbean women's texts "treating the middle-generation woman, the heroine's mother, as a compromised or alienated figure, while elevating a grandmother, other mother, or mythic mother figure to the special, honorific status of 'good' nurturer" (121). Similarly, Simone A. James Alexander addresses the ambivalence of the fictional mother in the conflicted mother-daughter trope by expanding the definition of Gloria Wade-Gayles' term the "othermother." While Rody aligns the othermother as a non-biological mother in the category of good nurturer, Alexander identifies the othermother both as surrogate or substitute mothers who serve as nurturers and embody strength and as biological mothers who have been othered and placed in the position of enemy (7).

Furthermore, Alexander's assertion that the othering of the mother as an enemy is caused by the daughter seeing the mother aligned with colonial forces runs parallel with Rody's assertion that othermothers "tend to be bearers of culture [and] connected to the land" (121). As a result, the daughters' rejection of the biological mother is caused by dissatisfaction with the limited, imposed identity of the colonial forces and the withholding of other cultural identities by the mother, since the daughters are seeking a cultural identity beyond the constraints of the colonial powers. Rody and Alexander's studies focus on daughters whose rejection of their mothers results in their leaving the physical space of the Caribbean for the motherland (Africa) or the mother country (Britain or America) in search of a cultural identity and homeland, which ultimately fails and results in their return to the Caribbean space and their reunions, both physical and metaphorical, with the biological mothers.¹ There is an unaddressed,

¹ A few examples of texts treated by Alexander and Rody that show these reunions are Kincaid's *Annie John* and *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*.

alternative representation of this trope, however, in which the daughters do not leave the Caribbean space; they are, instead, represented as struggling to find their cultural identity and homeland while remaining in the Caribbean. I argue that this shows a break in the conflation of the mother and Caribbean space, allowing the mother to be rejected while the Caribbean space is not.

Contemporary Caribbean literature's representation of the struggling daughters remaining in the Caribbean space, as opposed to leaving it as the earlier texts portray, draws attention to the importance of that particular space. In *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* Alison Donnell questions Paul Gilroy's model of the Black Atlantic that overlooks the Caribbean, along with other models that make claims about Caribbean identity disconnected from place. Donnell argues for the importance of place and the function of the local in Caribbean writing. Likewise, in this alternative representation of the mother-daughter trope, the desire to reject the mother without rejecting the physical space of the Caribbean represents the role of place in the establishment of one's identity. The connection of identity to the space of the Caribbean, comprised of migrants bringing varying pieces of cultural identity with them, becomes particularly important to the situation of this trope within narratives about national identities. The texts I will be looking at here consider the difficulty and necessity of developing fluid national identities that reflect the various cultural identities of its citizens at moments when new possibilities for national identities arise.

In this article, I explore this alternative representation of the conflicted mother-daughter trope in Elizabeth Nunez's *Bruised Hibiscus* (2000) and Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998). The decision to not leave the Caribbean space, while one searches for identity and belonging requires us to reconsider the way the space is presented in the literature. In doing so, I expand and reconfigure Alexander's mother/motherland/mother country trichotomy to account for the diverse population of the Caribbean included in Nunez and Powell's novels and an understanding of homeland as separate from motherland. The trichotomy I am working from is that of the homeland/motherland/mother country, in which the homeland is represented by othermother, the motherland is represented by the mother, and the mother country is represented by a patriarchal figure. This trichotomy surrounds the daughter as the new Caribbean subject who is trying to define her identity outside of colonial frameworks and inside the space of the Caribbean. Within this trichotomy, it is important to account for the multiple motherlands connected to the Caribbean space; in addition to Africa, Asia and South America appear as motherlands in these two texts. The distinction of these motherlands as separate from the homeland is necessary in order to understand the interactions of the multiple diasporas in the space of the Caribbean. Moreover, the acknowledgement of multiple motherlands is integral in negotiating the identity of

the individual homeland, which is then connected to the struggle of the daughters' understandings of their own identities.

The negotiation of this revised trichotomy occurs within the space of the homeland and it is the task of the othermother to provide their daughters with the necessary tools to establish their identities within the space. Alexander's expansion of the meaning of othermother to include biological mothers challenges the binary of biological mothers as failed nurturers and surrogate/substitute mothers as good nurturers. Biological mothers who have been othered can respond to this othering by claiming the Caribbean space in order to repair the relationship with their daughters. These relationships are important when considering the conflation of the Caribbean space with the mother because the ambivalent representation of the mother now reflects attitudes towards the Caribbean space. The frustration with the mother as the Caribbean space is a frustration with the controlling mother country and with the distancing of the motherland; Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* is frequently discussed in this way.² The conflicted mother-daughter trope as a metaphor for the strained relationships between the mother country, the motherland, and the homeland offers possibilities for the future of the Caribbean space. It can help us consider the way in which the mother figures guide the daughters by moving away from the mother country and the motherlands to establish independent homelands in the Caribbean space. Successful othermothers reconcile the space of the homeland for the daughter, which transforms the Caribbean homeland into the new motherland and enables the daughter to establish a cultural identity as citizen.

The reconciliation of the space of the homeland in order to establish a cultural identity is situated in knowledge passed to the daughters. Rody identifies a trend in the function of the mother-daughter relationship between the revision of history and the recovery of history. She describes the process of historical revision as marked by "the daughter's violated *relationship* with her mother" and the process of historical recovery as marked by a reunion with the mother which suggests "the generation of a hopeful future" (124). Historical revision and historical recovery can be seen occurring within the same texts; this allows the redefinition of a once conflicted relationship between the mother and the daughter. However, these established representations of the conflicted mother-daughter trope are further complicated by Nunez and Powell. In *Bruised Hibiscus*, Nunez positions the non-biological othermother, not the biological mothers, as the site of historical recovery with the success of that recovery dependent on the daughters' ability to situate themselves within the knowledge provided by the

² Both Laura Niesen de Abruna's, and Anna Morris and Margaret Dunn's essays in *Motherlands* (1992) stress the importance of Annie's early childhood bond with her mother and the alienation she experiences in the mother country as important in her search for identity which she discovers is located with her mother in the Caribbean, not abroad.

othermother, the biological mothers, and their own experiences. In *The Pagoda*, Powell presents this trope from the less common perspective of the biological mother who is a first generation immigrant to the Caribbean space and has her own identity—both personal and cultural—to negotiate before her daughter’s struggle can be addressed.

Little scholarly attention has been paid to Nunez’s *Bruised Hibiscus* despite her complex treatment of race, gender, and sexuality in the post-colonial moment of the soon to be independent nation of Trinidad in relation to the development of a national identity.³ Set in 1956, *Bruised Hibiscus* follows the customary narrative style of the conflicted mother-daughter trope that presents the conflict from the daughter’s viewpoint. Donette Francis argues that a key feature of the violent love stories in *Bruised Hibiscus* is that “this foundational moment of state formation unfolds through the micropolitics of intimacy rather than the macropolitics of revolution” (*Fictions*, 97). Another one of these micropolitics of intimacy that exist outside of the romantic and sexual relationships in the novel is the mother-daughter relationship. The narrative is split between two daughters, Rosa and Zuela, who were surrogate sisters for a few short months as children. It depicts numerous moments in which Rosa and Zuela grapple with the neglect and absence, respectively, of their biological mothers as both find themselves in a state of motherless isolation. Rosa is alienated by her mother for her mother’s own self preservation and eventually finds herself with an emotionally abusive husband who is using her for silent revenge against her father. Zuela is left motherless after the death of her mother when she is a young child and she is taken from Venezuela to Trinidad to live under the restrictive control and watchful eye of her surrogate father turned rapist turned husband, HoSang, a Chinese shopkeeper. While Rosa’s activity is not limited in the same way Zuela’s is, Rosa is not shown interacting with any friends or people outside of her home except for Zuela, Mary Christophe, and the occasional taxi driver. Both women have been coping independently with physical and emotional trauma since their childhoods, including estrangement from one another and their othermother, Mary Christophe. The daughters’ estrangement from Mary Christophe represents their estrangement from Trinidad as their homeland and the limitedness of their futures within that unknown space. I contend that upon reentering their lives, Mary Christophe functions as an unredeemable othermother for Rosa—with her

³ Jennifer Sparrow’s “Writing the ‘Paradoxes of Belonging’: Elizabeth Nunez and *Wide Sargasso Sea*” argues that *Bruised Hibiscus* responds to the unwritten silences in earlier texts, such as *The Tempest*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Donette Francis’s chapter on *Bruised Hibiscus* in *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship* looks at the role of violence in intimate relationships and the connections those relationships have to the development of citizenship within new nation formation. Both of these approaches are very productive to understanding Nunez’s project, but the significance of her mother-daughter relationships has not been addressed.

resistance to accept the role of othermother—and as a redeemable othermother for Zuela—with her understanding of the colonial space and its postcolonial future.

Rosa's position in relation to the Caribbean space is unique from the other characters that will be discussed here because she is a hybrid character who is both white Creole and Afro-Trinidadian, and her violent end is reflective of her inability to understand those two identities together. Rosa's Afro-Trinidadian heritage is one of her family's hidden secrets. Rosa remains unaware of the Appleton family secrets until she is reunited with Mary Christophe who reveals that Rosa is not Mr. Appleton's biological daughter, but the daughter of a black man who left the island after his affair with Mrs. Appleton. Mrs. Appleton's individualized treatment of Rosa in order to maintain the silence of her daughter's biological background is what initially brings about Rosa's indifference to her. Mary Christophe's breaking of the silence causes Rosa to reinterpret her experiences with her mother and changes her perception of the events that took place between them. Rosa had previously justified her mother's treatment of her by creating an illusion that her mother was doing the same things for her that she had done for her sisters because "Mothers did that—white mothers in Trinidad" (Nunez 133). Her rationalization of her mother's actions as being characteristic of white mothers in Trinidad begins to show that Mrs. Appleton's behaviors towards her daughters and the Caribbean are racially motivated. Rosa views mothers sending their daughters to live with an aunt or finding their daughters husbands from England as acts of protection that kept their daughters safe from "the presumptuous eyes of native boys" (133). It is not until Mary Christophe reveals Mrs. Appleton's secret that Rosa is able to use "the word abandoned to describe what her mother had done to her" (133). These new feelings towards her mother quickly develop into blame for Mrs. Appleton not loving her enough and the disappointment that Mrs. Appleton's actions were not for the protection of her daughter, but for the protection of herself (206). Yet, before receiving this knowledge, the silence between them has already led Rosa to remove Mrs. Appleton from the role of mother.

Mrs. Appleton exhibits her compliancy with patriarchal demands through her obsession with England and finding her daughters white men from the mother country instead of the white Creole men of Trinidad. This shows her conscious rejection of a white Creole identity for herself and her other daughters. Mary Christophe relates her account of protesting Mrs. Appleton's fixation on raising her daughters as English, instead of Trinidadian in her attempt to pass both personal and cultural knowledge to Rosa:

"She think your sisters good for nothing but to sell in England. I tell her, No. I tell her, Teach them to live here, teach them to make their way here. They Trinidadians now. Their people come same

time with my people. True, is a big difference: They come on deck; we come in the hold, but all of us are Trinidadians, different color, but Trinidadians now. She say never. She don't want them to be low class like me, to be nigger like me. So she teach them only English ways—how to hold knife and fork; how to say the words the English way. She tell me not to talk to them, only serve. Not to talk so I don't contaminate their English. Contaminate!" She snorted, "Contaminate!" She released Rosa's hand, "Is she who contaminate and she know it. Every time she see me, she know is she who contaminate." (112)

The repetition of "Trinidadian," "teach," and "contaminate" reflects Mary Christophe's belief in Trinidad and the role of the mother as teacher. In this account, Mary Christophe comments on women's position in society, the idea of Trinidadian citizenship, and the ambivalence surrounding a perceived contamination. Mary Christophe is outraged at Mrs. Appleton's use of her role as mother to propagate the oppressive mother country's ideas of contamination, which is first suggested as cultural contamination and then it is called out by Mary Christophe as racial contamination. Mary Christophe's response to Mrs. Appleton's use of the word "contamination" with racial connotations surrounds the tension between the Appletons and Mary Christophe's knowledge of their family secret. The racial contamination Mary Christophe is referring to here is Rosa.

The cultural contamination emphasized through the repetition of the term Trinidadian is a frustration with the rejection of a Trinidadian identity. Mary Christophe views Mrs. Appleton as treating her daughters as commodities whose mannerisms and language have been crafted to fit the needs of English society to be exported to English husbands. Mary Christophe recounts this conversation that occurred twenty years earlier, while nearly ten years still remain until Trinidadian independence. Yet, Mary Christophe is able to see Trinidadians as separate from British subjects, stating repeatedly that they are "Trinidadians now," not English. She does not draw distinctions between who can and cannot be Trinidadian, but sees all long term inhabitants of Trinidad as having the choice and responsibility to reject the patriarchal constructs of a distant mother country and embrace the reality of their homeland as its own nation in the process of constructing its own identity.

Mary Christophe is supportive of the Trinidadian space as the real future for the Appleton daughters and knows that their marriages to Englishmen will fail regardless of whether they live in mother country or homeland because they are born and raised in the hybrid Caribbean space which makes them culturally Trinidadian and not British. Despite her resistance, Mrs. Appleton is forced to

find her two oldest daughters white Creole husbands from Trinidad after their marriages to Englishmen do fail. Mary Christophe claims to have foreseen this unfolding of events stating, “I want to tell her they get it natural. England don’t give them what they want, what they *need*. But she don’t want to accept” (112 emphasis original). The Appletons are on their tenth generation of Trinidadian born British subjects who are naturally culturally Trinidadian. The oldest Appleton daughters’ failed marriages represent the dysfunctional relationship between Britain and Trinidad, showing that the people of Britain and Trinidad cannot successfully inhabit each other’s space. Mrs. Appleton’s actions, as representative of the mother country, show the inability to understand culture and identity outside of racial constructs that make the whiteness of white men in England more desirable than the whiteness of white Creole men in Trinidad. Mary Christophe attempts to develop Mrs. Appleton’s ideas of her daughters’ relationship to Trinidadian culture, but she is unable to breakthrough those colonial and patriarchal ideologies.

Mrs. Appleton’s marital infidelity shows her own struggle with her white Creole identity, which fuels her desire to connect with the Caribbean space. She is, however, unable to let go of her mother country—which doubles for her as the motherland—and recognize the possibility of an alternate identity that would fit within the Caribbean space. Rosa does not view her mother as an enemy, but maintains a similar indifference towards her mother that her mother holds towards her. Mrs. Appleton’s rejection of Trinidad as homeland, her rejection of Rosa as the literal embodiment of Trinidadian creolization that Mary Christophe advocates, and her white-British background prevent her from being othered as a mother and she prevents herself from being redeemable by continuing to reject her daughter and refusing to claim the Caribbean space as home. Mary Christophe’s argument for embracing Trinidad as the homeland is as unsuccessful when presented to Rosa as it is when presented to Mrs. Appleton. Like her mother, Rosa processes Mary Christophe’s information through the values of the mother country, which place race as central to identity. It is this valuing of race that eventually results in Rosa’s death. There is no longer a place for Rosa as the new Caribbean subject if she is unable to reconceptualize the Caribbean space without the colonial and patriarchal ideologies instilled by her parents acting as the mother country.

Mary Christophe’s estrangement and eventual rediscovery are a result of the power of the mother country exerted over Rosa through her parents. Mary Christophe had worked for the Appleton family for many years when she was fired under the guise of her newly manifested illness; in actuality, her illness gives the Appletons a reason to fire her for her knowledge of the family secrets. The manifestation of an internal auto-immune disease on Mary Christophe’s face illustrates an internal change on the face of the homeland. Upon her rediscovery

of Mary Christophe, Rosa initially remembers the rash related to Mary Christophe's illness on her face as a beautiful butterfly. Rosa's initial view of Mary Christophe's marking denotes her open mindedness about the Trinidadian space. Mary Christophe, as the figurative Trinidad, positions the country as going through a metamorphosis and emerging in the adult form of the butterfly. Mr. Appleton, as representative of the patriarchal mother country, refuses to acknowledge this transformation as a positive growth and, defensively, positions Trinidad as a predatory wolf when his position in the region becomes threatened. His refusal to recognize Trinidad developing into its own independent country leads Mr. Appleton to break his promise that Mary Christophe always has a place on their plantation, and he sends her away to fend for herself. But as Rosa gradually realizes her displacement in her world, she "found herself rediscovering the markings of the wolf on Mary Christophe's face. She had told her that there was a butterfly on her face, but she must have lied; she must have believed her father. She must have seen his twisted vision" (105-106). Rosa is conscious of the power her father's disdain for Mary Christophe has on her own opinion of Mary Christophe. She is not only conscious of her father's influence over her, but also that his view of Mary Christophe is distorted through "his twisted vision." What is initially interpreted as a beautiful butterfly is turned into a predatory animal which must be stopped and removed by the mother country. As an embodiment of the mother country, Mr. Appleton is unable or unwilling to see the transformation occurring in the homeland, which will eventually reject the mother country. Rosa's susceptibility to the twisted vision of the mother country sets her up to fail in the space of the Caribbean. Rosa quickly forgets to remember Mary Christophe and enters her period of motherlessness, which leaves her disconnected from her homeland and, as a result, disconnected from herself. The unstable colonial space of Trinidad as it moves towards its independence is a spatial and temporal moment in which the mother is necessary as nurturer of that future and as the bearer of culture to establish a stable country. Rosa, however, becomes lost in the transition without a mother figure to guide her.

Rosa, instead, moves forward with her parents' twisted visions dictating her understanding of her identity as first and foremost racial. Upon finding out her biological father is black, Rosa immediately sees herself as belonging in the Afro-Trinidadian community where Mary Christophe lives. Mary Christophe repeatedly warns Rosa about the violence brewing in Laventille, but Rosa sees herself protected, initially by her difference through her privileged status of being a white woman and then through her identification as "one of them" (242). It is following her gang rape that Rosa is met by the reality of women's experiences in the Laventille community. One of the women brings Mary Christophe a blanket to wrap Rosa in and expresses the sympathy of the community's women: "'I'm sorry. We're sorry.'" Then she disappeared into the line of silent women that had

formed along the sides of the street in that town of tears—a corridor of women sobbing so quietly they could not be heard. Ten of them wore flowers on their arms” (245). Rosa is ignorant to think that being “one of them” offers her protection from the violence. The women apologize to Rosa for their inability to protect her from the violence they too experience. The violence Mary Christophe warns Rosa about and that leaves the silently sobbing women with flowering bruises on their arms is a result of rising tensions of the Trinidadian subjects. The desire for freedom from the mother country is displaced on the women in acts of violence, which alludes to the complexity of issues awaiting an independent Trinidad that is not the idealized homeland Rosa imagines.

Rosa’s inability to understand the social condition of Trinidad is a result of the mother country’s success in distancing her from a possible Trinidadian culture and identity. Mary Christophe’s new presence in Rosa’s life fails to disrupt Rosa’s ideologies from the mother country in order to prepare her for the issues involved in establishing a Trinidadian national identity, and even more specifically women’s place in that process. Mary Christophe fails as othermother for Rosa because Rosa is unable to process the knowledge Mary Christophe provides her, while Mary Christophe is unable to commit herself entirely to the role of othermother. However, Mary Christophe understands her failure with Rosa and she is able to embrace the role of othermother for Zuela.

Zuela is a first generation immigrant to the Caribbean space and she is also a mother, but her position in the narrative is from the perspective of a lost daughter. Since Zuela’s mother is dead, she struggles with memories of her mother as a nurturer and idealized projections of the knowledge her mother would have passed onto her about men and how to protect herself as a woman. The absence of her mother represents a different form of unintentional silence but still leaves her vulnerable due to a lack of knowledge. This lack of knowledge that she gradually comes to understand while still in her childhood is knowledge about the relationship between her own body with its developing sexuality and her vulnerability to sexual predators and violence. Zuela’s understanding of her relationship with her mother does not begin to form until she is exposed to the silence her mother kept from her, which, she realizes, limits her ability to protect herself. She silently reassures herself that if her own mother was still alive, she would rescue and protect Zuela from her current plight. Zuela’s mother teaches her not to fear the harmless: “But she remembered that once she had been afraid of iguanas. Then her mother showed her that the spikes on their backs would not hurt her. The scales on their skin were soft, not hard like fish scales. Not sharp like metal. *Touch. Touch. Feel it. See?*” (62). In this, Zuela is taught that her fears are unsubstantiated. The unanticipated danger in this revelation is that Zuela is left unaware that there are valid fears. This fond memory of her mother allows Zuela to forgive her mother’s silence because her mother had passed an amount of

knowledge onto her, and Zuela believes her mother would have continued to do so. Her mother's untimely death and the limited nature of the age-appropriate knowledge she passes onto Zuela leave her to make sense of her experience as a child bride and mother on her own, without the guidance of a mother or a mother figure.

Unlike Rosa, Zuela does not need the silence spoken for her. Having lost her childhood at an early age, she is able to gain a genuine understanding of women's situations through her own experiences. Upon witnessing a young girl being sexually violated in the hibiscus bush, Zuela relives her own experiences realizing that "she knew she had learned too late that an iguana was a lizard was a snake, and a snake was a snake was a snake" (136). For Zuela the iguana is evocative of her fears and its transformation from harmless iguana into the dangerous snake indicates her awareness of the reality of her life. She realizes that her mother had "lived to teach her only a part of that lesson, the part before the iguana was a snake: the magic mothers created for their young daughters, bargaining for one more day in Eden before innocence is snatched from them forever" (136). Despite the suffering Zuela experiences, she does not negatively view her mother's incomplete lesson. From her perspective as a mother, she understands the difficult task mothers have of negotiating their daughters' limited innocence which, like Eden, will be taken without their full understanding, as their process of seeking knowledge results in the loss of innocence. Zuela's early transition from childhood to motherhood leaves her less concerned with herself and more focused on protecting her children, especially her own daughters.

The situation surrounding Zuela's relationship with her mother is unique from that of Rosa's and Mrs. Appleton's because Zuela's relationship with her mother took place in their motherland, Venezuela. Venezuela had been an independent country for a century prior to Zuela's birth, which allows the relationship between her and her mother to be defined upon terms outside of colonial constraints. After the death of her husband, Zuela makes no attempt to return to Venezuela. Instead, she finds a home for her and her children to live in in Trinidad. She takes the knowledge from her mother combined with the knowledge she establishes herself and decides to make a home for herself independently. Zuela is not presented as clinging to her motherland or persuaded by the mother country, which allows her to succeed and reestablish a successful relationship with her othermother, Mary Christophe. Unlike Rosa, Zuela does not attempt to understand her identity in terms of race; she, instead, attempts to see it through her new position as an independent woman in the country she chooses to live.

Mary Christophe's reclaiming of Zuela as her daughter in response to Rosa's violent end represents not just the homeland's refusal to remain silent any longer, but also its rise against the mother country. Where Rosa does not initially

recognize Mary Christophe, Zuela recognizes her right away. Mary Christophe states that her reason for seeking out Zuela “is to get back my Rosa. To finish being a mother to her by being a mother to you” (286). Mary Christophe realizes her role in losing Rosa as a daughter and seeks to offer herself as mother. She represents Trinidad as a homeland in the process of shifting to the possibility of a new, nurturing motherland, coming forward to claim her inhabitants as her children. On the eve of the revolution, she returns Zuela’s rightful name to her: “‘Daughter.’ Mary Christophe squeezed her hand, and claimed her” (286). Zuela is drawn into Mary Christophe’s use of the name Daughter because “it was the name she wanted, the name that named her rightly, the name that her mother had chosen for her because she loved her” (285). Daughter replaces the reference to Venezuela that her current name evokes. Though she is unable to claim the name Daughter when given the opportunity to rename herself, she accepts it after Mary Christophe appears and reclaims its meaning, reflecting Zuela’s desire to be a daughter again. Zuela is also receptive to Mary Christophe’s request to be her mother: “*A mother. A mother who could teach her that even the spikes on the back of an iguana could not hurt her if she owned herself*” (286). While Zuela does not actually need a mother to teach her what she already knows, she accepts Mary Christophe as a nurturer who can help her start a new life in her adopted homeland.

Mary Christophe offers to fight for the Trinidadian space and create a nation in which Zuela can own herself and be protected. Mary Christophe and Zuela’s reunion represents the possibilities of a future that Mary Christophe is unable to reach with Rosa. Zuela is able to understand that there are still dangers in the newly forming independent country, and Mary Christophe is fully committed to creating a protective space as a new motherland. Although Zuela is a biological mother to ten children, her narrative is driven by her still viewing herself as a daughter and her desire to be a daughter again, not by her position as mother.

Like Zuela, Powell’s protagonist, Lowe, is a first generation immigrant to the Caribbean whose relationship with her biological mother is cut short. Lowe, however, does not desire to return to her position as daughter at any point; she desires to be acknowledged as mother to her biological daughter. The presentation of the conflicted mother-daughter trope from the perspective of the biological mother instead of the daughter in *The Pagoda* reveals the complicated process the mother experiences in order to construct a new cultural identity for herself and her daughter in the space of the Caribbean while positioned as other by her daughter. This perspective from the biological mother revises the image of the mother from complacent oppressor for the mother country to struggling subject of the homeland, much like the daughter in this trope.

Powell acknowledges that *The Pagoda*, set in the mid-nineteenth century is her contribution to writing Chinese women's experiences into Caribbean history ("The Dynamics"). Powell works to fill the silence surrounding the Chinese woman's experience as her main character, Lowe, works to do the same within the text. This experience is framed around Lowe's struggle with many aspects of her own identity, but for purposes of this article I will focus on her negotiation of national identities and her identity as mother. As the biological mother, Lowe works to reclaim her daughter by making decisions about her own identity and permanent place in the world as she reconciles her motherland and her new homeland within the space of the Caribbean. Lowe functions as the othermother in this narrative for two reasons: first, her daughter does not know her as a biological mother and second, her dysfunctional relationship with her daughter positions her as the enemy. The narrative centers on Lowe's struggle to break the silence that has controlled and defined her for decades. It is her inability to break this silence in person that leads to her multiple attempts to put her experience down in writing as a letter to her daughter, Liz. Donette Francis identifies the importance of Lowe's letters "as a metonym for abortive attempts to write the history of Chinese women in the Caribbean" ("Uncovered," 74). In the narrative, these abortive attempts illustrate the struggle Lowe has with the silencing of her history. It is this silence that leaves Lowe restless and unable to connect with her new homeland. Additionally, it leaves Liz estranged from her mother and Chinese identity.

While Lowe does not initially know how to break the silence, her multiple attempts show her acknowledgement of her role in withholding cultural and personal knowledge. Although she maintains her silence, she remains focused on the importance of conveying that knowledge to her daughter. In the draft of the letter she is working on at the beginning of the novel, Lowe states "I am not your father like you think" (Powell 8). Her process of claiming her role as mother and reestablishing a relationship with her daughter whom she has not seen in twenty years begins with her acknowledgement of what she is not. As this draft progresses, she attempts to piece together reasons for her actions which create a fragmented sequence of events that fail to explain anything. The final sentences to this draft read, "Miss Sylvie...Well, she is not your rightful mother either. I..." (8). It is at this point that Lowe crumples up the piece of paper and gives up on another attempt at conveying her story to her daughter. The final ellipsis in this letter represents the silence Lowe has been unable to confront for over three decades—a silence that remains unspoken/unwritten into existence. She cannot claim her position as biological mother to Liz despite her desire and numerous attempts to do so. From the narrative perspective of the mother, Lowe stations herself as the struggling subject, the position traditionally occupied by the daughter, rather than the distanced motherland; although her additional position as

othermother to Liz has her shifting between representing both the motherland and the homeland, in addition to the subject. Her movement between these positions leave her unable to define herself in terms of what she is by the end of the narrative. What does change, however, is her ability to articulate her experience.

Lowe's life story, that she is unable to speak or write to her daughter, shows the power of the mother country over the motherland and homeland. It simultaneously illustrates the reasons Lowe works on behalf of the mother country and withholds her knowledge of the motherland from her daughter. After escaping the constraints of her position as a young woman in China by dressing as a man and stowing herself away on a ship bound for the Americas, Lowe is discovered by the ship captain, Cecil, and her temporary freedom is lost until Cecil's death over thirty years later. After Cecil repeatedly rapes and impregnates her, his patriarchal constraints place her in the role of man and father. Cecil keeps Lowe's secret and establishes her as a man in the Jamaican community to "protect" her. In doing this, Cecil maintains his control over Lowe because she is afraid of the consequences if she is discovered in a space where Chinese women are not supposed to be. In addition, Cecil finds a white Creole woman, Miss Sylvie, who is hiding her African descent, to act as wife to Lowe and mother to Liz. It is this personal history, along with her cultural identity, that Lowe has kept hidden from her daughter for decades.

Throughout the thirty years Lowe masquerades as a man, Cecil and Miss Sylvie function as the oppressive mother country by imposing themselves on her and Liz's lives. When reflecting on Liz's childhood, Lowe remembers that she

was annoyed at the prominence of the position both Miss Sylvie and Cecil had staked out in [Liz's] life. Especially Cecil, whom she saw once or twice a year, for three days at most, when his ship full of stolen laborers docked and he collected his purseful of gold and he stopped by the shop to oversee his goods. (66)

For Lowe, Cecil represents the mother country because he does not make a home in Jamaica, but instead exploits it to gain capital by moving his merchandise. His actual presence in Jamaica is sparse, yet he has completely imposed himself upon Lowe by dictating her experience—from whom she marries and where she works to her gender and cultural identity. In order to start her life over, Lowe acknowledges and attributes the lost aspects of her Chinese culture, such as her ability to speak Hakka and Cantonese, to "mindful forgetting" (36). Her desire to fit in works in favor of the mother country, as she rejects her connections to the motherland. Lowe's silent struggle against Cecil and Miss Sylvie distances Liz from her; Lowe is unable to address this estrangement until after Cecil's death. The removal of the hold of, or independence from, the mother country,

represented first through Cecil's death and then through Miss Sylvie's departure, allows Lowe the personal space to begin establishing her own identity and, once again, making her own life decisions. To do this Lowe tries to reclaim aspects of her Chinese culture, which she hopes will help Liz understand her own Chinese-Jamaican identity.

Prior to her coming to Jamaica, Lowe's complicated relationship with her own parents in China confuses her identity and cultural knowledge. The only difference Lowe initially recognizes between her brothers and herself is that they attend school, while she is taught by her father in his shop. Lowe's relationship with her father places her at both a physical and emotional distance from her mother. In her final draft of her letter to Liz, Lowe writes,

I didn't know my mother at all. From so early my father had snatched me away from her, kept me for himself [...] I only remember her hand on my face when I didn't want to go with the old man, I don't remember her eyes. Maybe she walked around with them closed all the time, refusing to look at the world, or maybe there just wasn't light inside of them. But she was young, way younger than my father [...] And who is to tell the kind of man he was to her. Who is to tell. (245)

Her attempt to explain her and her mother's nonexistent relationship and identify patterns in their experiences is connected to Lowe's desire to be recognized as mother. One result of her father keeping her from her mother is that the dreams Lowe's father instill in her are ones that, as a girl or woman, she would not be allowed to pursue. Lowe's musings about her mother's eyes, age, and relationship with her father all mirror Lowe's experience of betrayal, first by her body upon reaching adolescence, and then by her father, which results in her being traded as wife to an old man as a form of repayment of his debt. Based on her early experience of marriage, Lowe's memory of her mother as significantly younger than her father leads her to wonder about the terms of their marriage. Her focus on her mother's eyes also indicates that her mother may also have had dreams she was unable to pursue, resulting in her not looking at the world so as not to be reminded of her loss. Unlike Zuela, Lowe does not have an opportunity as a child to learn from her mother before her childhood ends. Lowe does not desire to resume the role of daughter, but attempts to show Liz her knowledge of the mother's position being overpowered by patriarchal forces.

Lowe is, therefore, presented with the difficult task of reconciling her standing as betrayed daughter, while occupying the positions of biological mother and othermother, which results in her conflating her own experience in the Caribbean with her daughter's. This conflation betrays her ability to acknowledge

her frustrations with her own position and experiences. It is when Liz runs away with an older man that Lowe's relationship with her daughter is severed because she wants her daughter to have access to opportunities she herself did not have in life and marriage. Lowe's account of her experience visiting Liz's home interchanges Liz's husband with repressive Cecil:

Lowe saw Cecil in the wide gaps of his son-in-law's teeth; saw him in the hazy glow of the son-in-law's eyes; heard Cecil in his deep, throttling laughter; saw him again in the somber pathos of his son-in-law's gestures; and he asked himself with quiet alarm, had Miss Sylvie seen this grotesque manifestation [...] But the old man was so slovenly and unshapely, though his voice was deep and kind. The man was so much older than Lowe, so much older, and didn't he look like Cecil! (72)

Viewing her son-in-law as older returns Lowe to her own experience of marrying a much older man. It should be underscored that whether or not this man is older than Lowe, Liz chooses the marriage and is not forced into it as Lowe once was. Additionally, Lowe's unresolved feelings towards Cecil regarding his repeated violations and rapes manifest in this eerie vision of Cecil in her son-in-law. Lowe finally sees him as "the dead stamp of Cecil" (78) after he voices his anger towards Chinese merchants and Lowe's desire to establish Chinese culture, via the Pagoda, in Jamaica. By aligning him with Cecil, Lowe parallels her son-in-law with the oppressive mother country. Lowe fears that because of her silence about her past, Liz is now living the same life Lowe finally escapes. Liz's husband, however, is Afro-Jamaican and does not identify himself with the mother country, but with a Jamaica that is not determined by outside forces. This raises the issue of whether or not Lowe can establish a cultural identity for herself and Jamaica when several competing cultures comprise and contest the current and future identity of Jamaica.

The Pagoda idea that her son-in-law rejects is Lowe's attempt to graft a piece of the motherland on the island as a way to officially mark Jamaica as home to its Chinese-Jamaican population. Lowe's status as an immigrant, with strong ties to a Chinese-Jamaican community continually replenished by new arrivals of immigrants, constructs the motherland as a very present force, instead of silent. During dinner with her daughter, Lowe once again transfers her own conflicted feelings onto her daughter to explain Liz's tears: "In some strange way he knew she was crying for her lost childhood with this old man, and for her Uncle Cecil and the bind she and her Chinese people were in, there on the island, caught up as she was between two estranged worlds not wanting to choose sides, though it was growing harder and harder not to choose" (74). It is due to the silence that exists

between the mother and daughter that Lowe is unaware of Liz's actual experience. Lowe is only able to imagine her daughter's experience through her own. For Lowe the motherland, China, and the homeland, Jamaica, are the two estranged worlds she struggles to reconcile.

For Liz a different pull exists within the homeland; it is between her husband's Afro-Jamaican culture and Miss Sylvie's white Creole culture. Lowe has not taken Liz to the Chinese communities there on the island in order to meet Chinese people with whom she might identify, nor does Liz have knowledge of Chinese culture from which to feel a pull. Lowe earlier admits to herself,

what was the use of his dialect there, and the stories of his family, and the songs of his people, when there was no war to fight, no family to inculcate with values, no power to preserve, it had just been the two of them, the two of them alone there among the Negro villagers. (52)

There is not a strong Chinese presence in their town when Lowe arrives, just she and Liz. It is both Lowe's lack of knowledge of other Chinese on the island and her desire to fit in with the villagers in order to build a safe home for Liz that lead to Lowe keeping her knowledge of her Chinese culture to herself. Lowe believes that she and Liz are in the same position—although Liz's situation appears to be more complex—and she realizes that it is up to her to reconcile the space as homeland for her daughter. Lowe's solution to the estranged worlds is to insert Chinese culture into the public Jamaican space. Lowe chooses Jamaica as her permanent home with a desire to connect other Chinese immigrants to the Jamaican space with the construction of her Pagoda.

Ultimately, the construction of the Pagoda in Jamaica serves multiple purposes. It benefits Lowe as she tries to remember who she was before coming to Jamaica; it is for Liz to learn about the culture that is withheld from her; and, it is just as crucial for the Chinese community whose members are resistant to claiming Jamaica as home. Lowe's realization of her dream to build the Pagoda is her attempt to reclaim her identity and allows her to envision reconciling her relationship with her daughter. She sees the Pagoda as the way to connect to her daughter and to connect her daughter to their Chinese identity. Winifred Woodhull claims the significance of the Pagoda is that it "brings to the fore relations between Jamaicans of African descent and Chinese and Indian immigrants, relations between the Caribbean and Asia. It emphasizes relations of margin to margin and how they speak specificity of Caribbean history, which has its own shape, its own marginality, [and] its own spirit" (126). In addition to claiming Jamaican history from the mother country, the Pagoda also indicates an investment in the Caribbean as home for its Chinese-Jamaican citizens.

Furthermore, the Pagoda also is the outlet through which Lowe claims herself and, in turn, Jamaica as homeland. It is not until construction on the Pagoda has progressed that Lowe is able to write her silence in a letter to her daughter. She is still actively exploring the possibilities of her own identity, as is pre-independence Jamaica, but she is much closer to discovering herself after claiming Jamaica as her homeland.

Nunez's *Bruised Hibiscus* and Powell's *The Pagoda* address the difficulty involved in incorporating aspects of the various motherlands' cultures into the national identities within the Caribbean, especially when ideologies of the mother country remain present. These novels both show that the silence of the othermothers, through their lack of communication or miscommunication, limits the understanding of cultural knowledge and identity for mothers and daughters alike, resulting in an estrangement from the homeland and the self. The othermothers work towards fluid national identities that are separate from the mother county and not overly dependent on distant motherlands. Even though Rosa's outcome is tragic, Mary Christophe's commitment to the future of the country through her relationship with Zuela, and Lowe's dedication to exploring her own identity, suggest that it is necessary for the first-generation immigrant to situate her cultural identity independent of patriarchal influence so that the next generations of Creole citizens can establish their cultures within the Caribbean space. The depiction of Lowe's struggle with her own identity questions the hostilities towards the mother in the conflicted mother-daughter trope by suggesting that the mothers do not necessarily have the ability to give their daughters what they seek because the mothers are struggling as well. Thus, the defining of the homeland as the new motherland is dependent on the recognition of it as the only possibility, as shown by the characters remaining in the Caribbean space and looking inward despite the pain involved.

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